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AUTHOR Linder, Steve
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ABSTRACT

Before a new autonomous profession can be established a national definition of marriage counseling must be recognized. This report is an attempt to define "marriage counseling" by presenting a brief history and by describing four sources of definitions of this profession. These sources define marriage counseling as an autonomous profession, as a form of short-term psychotherapy, in terms of counselor functions. By consolidating these basic definitions, a new format can be organized which corresponds to the needs and functions of the profession. (Author/CJ)

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Marriage Counseling: Definition Of An Autonomous Profession

Steve Linder

C.W. Post College

Abstract

This report is an attempt to define "marriage counseling" by presenting a brief history and by describing four sources of definitions of this profession. Before a new autonomous profession can be established a national definition of marriage counseling must be recognized.

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This report is more than a historical review; it is an attempt to consolidate various writings describing the profession of marriage counseling. Before a new autonomous profession can be established, many attempts will have to be made to define, organize, and establish new criteria for this field. What criteria should be established will depend on the needs of the profession (i.e., a nationally recognized definition). Araoz (1973) showed that marriage counseling is an ideal profession based on Gross' three criteria; that it be socially necessary, open, and consultive. For years marriage counseling has been considered a quasi-profession and only recently, with the passage of California Assembly Bill Number 1823 (1963), has marriage counseling been considered as an independent profession. There is no question that marriage counseling is a psychological activity (Silverman, 1972) but from its specialized needs and functions marriage counseling may also be considered a profession in its own right as dentistry and podiatry are independent medical professions. Even Kimber (1967), who studied the various similarities between psychology and marriage counseling, saw these professions as independent!

The counseling of marriages is probably as old as the instituion of marriage itself. Today, as technology is advancing, trained professionals are available as replacements for the grandmother's wisdom, the tribal witch doctor, the bartender, and the barber (or the manicurist).

Marriage counseling, as a profession, began in the 1920s when Professor Ernest R. Groves taught the first university level course in marriage and family living in the United States. As a result of his teachings, Prof. Groves counseled his students. In 1928, two clinics opened for the purpose of counseling couples before and during marriage. A year later, Drs. Abraham

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and Hannah Stone opened the first marriage consultation center at Labor Temple in New York City. The American Institute of Family Relations was founded in 1930 with Paul Popenoe as director. The institute is still the oldest and largest family counseling center in North America. Two years later, the Marriage Counsel of Philadelphia was founded and Emily Mudd became its first director (Goodwin and Mudd, 1967).

In 1942, the American Association of Marriage Counselors was founded in order to provide and maintain professional standards in marriage counseling. The AAMC established training criteria, a code of ethics, guidelines for the development and maintainance of research, and the formulation of a public education program. By 1956 the AAMC had developed a special committee to sponsor formal training programs. Six years later, the AAMC's professional code of ethics was approved; the code provides for professional standards in such areas as advertising, confidential information, fees, and referrals (AAMFC, 1973; Reevy, 1967).

A group of psychologists from the American Psychological Association, in 1962, established the Academy of Psychologists In Marital and Family Therapy. Their goal was and still is to become a division of the APA.

California, in 1963, was the first state to license marriage (family and child) counselors. This was followed by Michigan (1966), New Jersey 1969), Utah (1973), and Nevada (1973) (Rutledge, 1973).

Recently (1972), a new organization was formed with one of its main purpose to promote marriage and family licensing laws throughout the nation: The National Alliance For Family Life, Inc.

Definitions of "Marriage Counseling"

One of the problems in describing the occupation of marriage counseling is defining it. Depending on the counselor's training and philosophy there are basically four ways to define "marriage counseling." Each definition contains a special quality; however independently, they all lack certain criteria that are needed to define this profession. Such criteria include defining "marriage counseling" as (a) an autonomous profession, (b) as a form of short-term psychotherapy, (c) in terms of the counselor's role, and (d) in terms of the counselor's clinical functions. The purpose of any occupational definition is to state the present needs and functions of the specific occupation (in this case, marriage counseling). By consolidating the basic four definitions and viewing the two types of attempted consolidated references of "marriage counseling," a new format might be organized that would correspond to the needs and the functions of this profession.

An autonomous profession "Marriage counseling" is still defined as a quasi-profession (part of ministry, medicine, law, social work, and psychology) dealing with marital problems. However, the quality of this definition is poor since it does not recognize the professional independence of marriage counseling. Without this independence, it will be hard to control the professional (educational) programs for a degree, license, or certification in marriage counseling. If each profession dictates their own requirements, then the length of the educational program and the quota system could not be established. For example, a MSW in the field of social work and a Ph.D. in clinical psychology requires different lengths of educational progress even though in their own discipline, the prestiege of the degrees are high. If one of the qualities of any profession requires a long term educational pro-

gram, then how can marriage counselors pursue this aim without seeking autonomy? The answer is impossible!

Another issue associated with autonomy is a reasonable quota system. In our democratic society no person really wants a quota system because it deprives others of the right to enter an occupation; but a quota system is necessary for the survival of the profession. We can see this advantage by applying the law of supply and demand to the medical profession. Since the supply of students entering the field is limited, then the public demand would be great and the yearly income of the doctors would rise. The professionals' public status and recognition is dependent upon their capital gains. This is one of the reasons why the public does not on a whole recognize public school teachers as professionals, while MSWs' and MDs' are considered professionals.

It should also be understood that the license qualifications for marriage counselors should be the same in each state. One of the problems that psychologists face is the strict licensing laws of one state and the lenient laws of its bordering states. In many states a certification or license means a quota. The quota system should be applied in the limiting of the number of enrolled students in the university program prior to any degree. When a person performs well in his program and receives that degree, why then should he be denied work in other states? In the legal profession restricting a lawyer to a state(s) is a reasonable request since the law varies in most states. But if the theories and techniques of psychology and psychotherapy remain constant throughout the United States, then why put a state quota on this profession?

Short-term psychotherapy "Marriage counseling" has also been defined as a

form of psychotherapy. Laidlaw, former president of the AAMFC stated:

> Marriage counseling is a form of short-term psychotherapy dealing with interpersonal relationships, in which problems relating to marriage are the central factor ... it is an approach carried out essentially at a conscious level ... If, as therapy progresses, unconscious factors are discovered which necessitate long and involved psychotherapeutic techniques, the case ceases to be in the field of marriage counseling (Hudson, 1970, p. 62).

When defining "marriage counseling" as a form of psychotherapy, we should realize that psychotherapy is a general classification of various forms of therapies. For example, Knox (1970) uses behavior contracts while Ellis (1961) utilizes rational-emotive therapy in dealing with marital problems. Kimber (1961) defines "marriage counseling" as a form of psychotherapy because a large portion of counseling is concerned with attitude changes on the part of the client. It seems advisable, therefore, to mention the type of therapy to which one is referring when defining "marriage counseling" in terms of psychotherapy.

This definition bridges the gap between the profession of marriage counseling and the other helping professions such as psychology, counseling, social work, and medicine. Marriage counselors must be skilled in the use of psychotherapeutic techniques as well as a firm understanding of legal, sociological, and psychological disciplines. However, this definition should not be used to represent the totality of the professional outlook since it only describes one aspect of the profession's needs.

The counselor's role Another basic definition of "marriage counseling" involves the counselor's role. The counselor may work with an individual, a couple (conjoint), or with a group. In addition, the counselor might teach

sex education, marital adjustment, childrearing, and other similar subjects. In defining "marriage counseling" in reference to what the counselor actually does, the public will better know what to expect when seeking help.

However, this definition could be circular in that to understand what a marriage counselor will do relies on how the counselor defines "marriage counseling." And how the counselor defines "marriage counseling" will depend on how he defines his own role. This reference is an important quality of a consolidated "marriage counseling" definition, but it can not constitute the thrust of the definition.

The counselor's clinical function "Marriage counseling" can be defined by the counselor's function in clinical areas. "Function" here can be understood in either of two ways: (1) as a type of counseling indicated by the client's social classification or (2) as a type of counseling indicated by the client's personal needs. These forms of the definition are both very similar to the above reference and have the same pitfall. There are basically six social-clinical classifications (phases) of marital counseling: premarital, marital, postmarital, family, divorce, and relationship (unmarried couples). Often this form of definition is combined with the above reference; for example, Ard and Ard (1970) in the Handbook of Marriage Counseling state:

> Marriage counseling may be considered in this context as any counseling with one or more clients dealing with problems related to marriage, including getting married (i.e., premarital counseling), staying married, or resolving problems related to marriage (e.g., sexual, money, children, in-laws, communication, etc.) or getting out of marriage (i.e., divorce counseling) (p.).

Araoz (1973) discusses the three modalities of clinical work of the marriage and family counseling as adaptive (clients seeking help in coping with extreme difficulties based on newly developed circumstances), therapeutic (clients seeking help in understanding frequent present role distortions based on past experiences), or maturational (clients seeking enrichment in their relationship or marriage), depending on the differnet variables. It should be noted that Araoz based his modalities on the client's needs rather than on his social classification.

With these four basic criteria (definitions) in mind, various attempts have been made to combine some of these references to produce a national recognized professional definition. It is important for the profession of marriage counseling to have a national definition in order for other professionals and the public to understand what "marriage counseling" means. Also, by having a national definition, the licensing of marriage counseling would be uniform. There are basically two types of national definitions which incorporate the four basic previous definitions. They are state and organization definitions.

"Marriage counseling" can be defined by state legislation when developing a marriage and family counseling license. This type of definition has great value since it provides laymen and professionals with a statewide reference. However, this type of definition can be applied only within the state and is not adequate for the field of marital counseling in general. The provision for certification of marriage counselors in Michigan states:

> "Marriage counseling" means the providing of guidance, testing, discussions, therapy, instructions, or the giving of advice, the principal purpose of which is to avoid, eliminate, relieve, manage

> or resolve marital conflict or discord or to create, improve, or to prepare couples for marriage (Nichols, Jr., 1973, p. 4).

In the Michigan definition there is no mention of an autonomous profession, no mention of counseling types besides marital and relationship, and no mention of the counselor's function in clinical areas. This definition is really too brief to be classified as a national definition even though it may provide for the needs within Michigan for licensing.

"Marriage counseling" can be defined by a national organization. The editors of Marriage Counseling; A Casebook (Mudd, Karph, Stone, and Nelson, 1958), which was edited for the American Association of Marriage and Family Counselors (AAMFC), stated:

> Marriage counseling may be defined as the process through which a professionally trained counselor assists a person or persons to resolve the problems that trouble them in their interpersonal relationships. The focus is on the relationship between the two persons in marriage, rather than, as in psychiatric therapy, the reorganization of the personality structure of the individual (p. 63).

As with the Michigan definition, this reference has a similar vague quality.

A good definition of "marriage counseling" which professionals and non-professionals could accept nationally should be a definition which has the qualities contained in the four basic references. Anything less would make any definition appear insufficient to the present needs of the profession. The following presentation is an attempted national definition of "marriage counseling".

> "Marriage counseling" is an autonomous profession which can be

considered a form of short-term psychotherapy involving individual, conjoint, or group experiences dealing with premarital, marital, postmarital, family, divorce, and relationship problems, centering on either adaptive, therapeutic, or maturational counseling modalities. (In addition a marriage counselor might teach sex education, marital adjustment, childrearing, and other similar topics in public and nonpublic institutions.)

This definition is based on the four basic qualities (definitions) of "marriage counseling" and in no way represents the views of any organization or represents the views of this journal. It has the advantage of being comprehensive while at the same time being open ended within the specific domain of this profession. It is offered in the hopes of classifying what a marriage counselor is as a professional.

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Footnote

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